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TO : Department of State

FROM : AMERICAN EMBASSY, LONDON, No. 1715

755.11/4-550

April 5, 1950

ACTION EUR*

INFO DCR OLI* ik

REF :

SUBJECT : THE RETURN OF KING LEOPOLD

EUR INDEX

755.11/4-550

There are transmitted herewith three copies of leading articles from The Times (independent conservative) and The Manchester Guardian (Liberal) of April 3, 1950, the first entitled "King Leopold's Choice" and the second "Decision for a King".

The fact that both of these outstanding newspapers should publish on the same day an editorial on the subject of the choice before King Leopold III is indicative of the importance attached to the question. The articles are in agreement as to the unlikelihood of the King's agreeing to abdicate, and his determination to force the issue. They are also in agreement as to the gravity of the consequences for the country. The Manchester Guardian's article concludes that "if events take the course it now seems they must inevitably take they will culminate in a Parliamentary vote consecrating not so much a King's return as the cleavage of his kingdom".

Frances E. Willis

Frances E. Willis
First Secretary of Embassy

Enclosures: 1. Article from The Times --"King Leopold's Choice"
2. Article from The Manchester Guardian -- "Decision for a King"

CC: AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

F...illis/jb

April 4, 1950.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR

REVIEWED BY J.L. Smith DATE NOV 19 1982

RDS☐or XDS☐EXT. DATE

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Enclosure No. 1 to despatch No. 1215 of 4/4/50
from the Embassy at London

PAPER: THE TIMES: NUMBER:

CITY: LONDON: DATE: APR - 3 1950

King Leopold's Choice

Three weeks after the referendum on the royal question the Belgian people and Parliament are as baffled and divided as they were before. The referendum showed that 57.7 per cent. of the Belgian voters wish KING LEOPOLD to return and "resume his constitutional powers." The KING himself, after hearing the result and conferring with M. EYSKENS, the Prime Minister, placed the responsibility on Parliament and promised to abide by its decision. To the Social-Christians, who are KING LEOPOLD'S chief supporters, the matter was simple enough. All that was necessary was to summon a joint meeting of both Houses of Parliament, in which they would have a clear majority, in order to bring the Regency to an end and invite the KING to return. In order to do this, however, the Government must first obtain a majority in the Chamber of Representatives; and the Liberals, who hold a balance of two votes in the Chamber and were partners in the Eyskens Government, refused to agree without conditions. M. EYSKENS was therefore forced to resign and since then a succession of elder statesmen have sought to form a Government which might have better success.

To-day the most recent of these aspirants, M. DEVÈZE, the Liberal deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence in the last Government, will visit KING LEOPOLD at Pregny to report on his failure. It was M. DEVÈZE'S worthy ambition to find a solution based on "national understanding" and with this idea he saw so many politicians, business men, and trade union leaders that it was wittily said that he was consulting the Belgian people a second time. His ingenious suggestion was that KING LEOPOLD should be invited to return to Belgium on the understanding that he would then abdicate in favour of his son, PRINCE BAUDOUIN. This, it was hoped, would satisfy KING LEOPOLD'S honour without dividing the country.

M. DEVÈZE might have persuaded the Socialists to accept this solution (though some feared that the KING might change his mind after returning) if the Social-Christians had been prepared to accept it. A large majority of the Social-Christians, however, will consider no solution except the unconditional return of the KING. Although M. DEVÈZE has failed he has done a considerable service. It is now clear, as no doubt he will tell KING LEOPOLD to-day, that no "national solution" is possible unless the KING is prepared to abdicate. Only then would the Social-Christians, who are the largest party, consent to any form of compromise. The only alternative is for a purely Social-Christian Government to try to obtain a majority in the Chamber or, failing that, to dissolve Parliament and seek new elections in which the KING would be opposed by all the other parties. It is not an easy choice for a proud and sensitive man who believes he has been gravely wronged; but the risks of widening the divisions in the country are plain.

Decision for a King

The powerlessness of men of goodwill and good sense—and they represent almost everyone in Belgium—to solve the crisis over the Royal Question has been sad to watch. The trouble is that the parties, and especially the Social Christians and the Socialists, are too deeply committed to their declared positions for and against Leopold's resumption of power to be able to retreat without substantial compensation in some form or other. Unfortunately in the present situation, there are only two possible alternatives: the King's effacement or the King's return. And what compensation is possible for a loss of face on such a clear-cut issue? In any case the parties in their opposition to each other represent permanent interests and tendencies in the nation. Their division goes deep. But Leopold represents only himself. The monarchy would not lose by his effacement, except in so far as it has already been harmed; Prince Baudouin would mount the throne. The responsibility for the present difficulties in Belgium, even now, therefore, rests with the King. The parties can only react to his actions. And M. Devéze, the Premier-designate, was grasping the nettle by its roots when he decided last week to try to persuade Leopold of the dangers of what a writer in "Le Monde" has called "the Restoration." Unfortunately the King has again declared his determination to continue on his present course. Though M. Devèze, at the behest of his party (the Liberals), still proposes to visit him at Pregny it will be without hope or fervour that he does so.

If Leopold returns he will inevitably be a party king. This may work as long as his party remains in power. But the Socialists have sworn eternal opposition to him, whether he returns or not. The first reverse to the Social Christians would call the monarch—if not by that time the monarchy—into question and every economic and social problem that arose would be poisoned by the issue. Not only that, but the Federalist Walloon movement would be sure to gain strength (it is already active) and add another complication to a situation where many of the workers in the vital sectors of industry are bitter against the presence on the throne of a "reactionary king." For that is what Leopold is widely believed to be, and his association with the Right would hardly dispel the idea. Of course, the worst previsions might not materialise. But as M. Spaak wrote in a recent open letter to the King in the Socialist "Le Peuple": "Great statesmen are first "of all those who prevent certain "problems from ever being raised; "and in the second place, those who "know how not to misuse victory." Excellent precepts. And the King's doubtful victory in the popular consultation lays it upon him to fulfil both these requirements. The issue he faces—or flouts—is not legal or constitutional, or even of personal pride, but one of practical politics. A large proportion of his subjects, regionally and linguistically concentrated, reject him. It is courting national disunity to outrage that proportion, even though it is a minority. Accordingly some hoped against hope that the evidence M. Devéze could put before Leopold of the failure of the

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